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ASSESSMENT OF SHORT-TERM VACATION CONDITIONS IN A SMALL-SIZE AGGLOMERATIONS' OF KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. The importance of touristic development depends not only on big cities that have international value but also on small and medium cities that has regional value. In this article we analyze current conditions of short-term vacation in three small-size metropolises of Kazakhstan — Aktobe, Kizilorda, Zharkent. The research is devoted to architectural and planning aspects of Kazakhstan's tourism development. The most important original data for analysis resulted from social and on-site surveys of considered territories. The results of the survey could be used to enhance current architectural and planning practice.

Keywords: architecture, city agglomerations, recreational potential, tourism, social and on-site surveys.

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ОЦЕНКА УСЛОВИЙ КРАТКОВРЕМЕННОГО ОТДЫХА В МАЛЫХ АГЛОМЕРАЦИЯХ КАЗАХСТАНА (АКТОБЕ, КЫЗЫЛОРДА, ЖАРКЕНТ)

Аннотация. Большую роль в развитии туристической отрасли играют не только крупнейшие города (обладающие международным значением), но также малые и средние города (обладающие региональным значением). Данная статья посвящена анализу существующих условий для кратковременного отдыха в трех городах Казахстана, обладающих признаками агломераций — Актобе, Кызылорда, Жаркент. Анализ проводится в контексте изучения архитектурно-планировочных аспектов развития туризма в Казахстане. Исходными данными для анализа послужили результаты анкетного опроса и натурного обследования рассматриваемых территорий. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы в архитектурной и градостроительной практике.

Ключевые слова: архитектура, городские агломерации, рекреационный потенциал, туризм, анкетный опрос населения, натурное обследование.

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1. Introduction

Today one of the main trends in spacial organization that has great impact on economic growth is organization of recreational and tourism activities. This is one of few industries that directly depends on visual, functional and sustainable qualities of the facilities, places and they are used to attract, accommodate and transport visitors to destination points. That is why architects and urban planners should pay a great attention to this issue.

Many developing and transition countries as Kazakhstan consider recreation and tourism to be important for sustainable development. First, tourism can contribute to economic growth. For example, the Gross Development Product (GDP) of the recreation

and tourism sector in the top ranking countries is considerable: in the United States — 450 billion US\$, in China — 240 billion US\$, in Japan — 110 billion US\$, in France — 100 billion US\$ [1]. Second, availability of the good quality tourism infrastructure may have a positive influence on the local standards of living [2]. The recreational facilities can be used not only by foreigners, but also by domestic residents. Third, introduction of the international environmental and safety standards can help to mitigate a negative impact of tourism on nature. Fourth, tourism industry does require an extensive use of resources as industrial or agricultural development. Fifth, development of international tourism can help to improve an international image of the country that will

positively influence its attractiveness for foreign investors. Moreover, tourism and recreation development lead to creation of new employment opportunities.

Kazakhstan has a high potential for both development of domestic tourism and attraction of foreign travellers to visit the country. However, the tourism industry is still undeveloped in Kazakhstan. The share of the tourism industry is only about 1.6% of GDP [1]. There are many reasons for that, but the main one is the quality of the physical infrastructure for recreation. Nowadays the quality of services provided at the most of the hotels does not meet the international standards. It's necessary to create alternative approaches to design, to locate, to build and to arrange functioning of tourism facilities. The presence of the qualitative physical environment (such as development of tourist places' accessibility in terms of transportation links, safety, tourism service facilities, etc.) may facilitate the development of the tourism in the country.

Architectural and planning aspects have a great influence on tourism industry development. This opinion is shared by a large number of researchers who deal with tourism and recreation architecture in Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Vilkovsky, Abilov, Antufeev, and Nurgaldieva) and global community (Solmaz, Baker, Baud-Bovy, Lawson, and Lovitu) [3–10]. The most important architectural and planning aspects are allocation and prioritizing of tourism resources, searching for an optimal transportation system, creating an attractive physical environment and so on. The creation of these conditions may contribute to the improvement of competitiveness and attractiveness of a certain tourism facilities and industry in general.

Actual architectural and urban design practices are still based on theoretical and practical experience of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In the USSR, planning was implemented by design and research institutes. Main decision makers of the design institutes were the leading architects (Vilkovsky) [3]. After the collapse of the USSR, state research institutes working in the field of architecture and urban planning were closed or lost their preliminary functions. Nowadays, market economic conditions require new approaches to architectural and urban design of tourism development. In this regard, it is very important to implement social surveys that aim to understand real demands and to collect live data in architectural and urban design. This article contains the results of one of the first large scale social surveys that was carried out in the independent Kazakhstan and dedicated to architecture and urban planning.

One of the main objectives of Kazakhstan today is to switch towards sustainable development. In this matter, a social research can play a special role, for it is one of the unique instruments that could connect the development of the physical environment proposed

by designers to the real needs of people as the main consumers. It is important to consider potential visitors' preferences as well as to forecast a possible number of visitors, demanding infrastructure and service qualities and others. Social survey results can help to make these forecasts more feasible. Implementation of architectural and urban design based on the social survey results may help to achieve a long-term, efficient economic growth, ecological safety and other sustainable development criteria.

2. The Case Study Cities

We have already considered results of our research about biggest urban agglomerations in Kazakhstan: Almaty, Shymkent and Astana [11]. In this paper, we focus on small urban agglomerations like towns, villages and connected groups. Even though, they do not have such a big potential in economic development of the country as big cities do, they have some advantages in terms of tourism [12–15].

This study was conducted to provide a preliminary assessment of the tourism industry conditions in small-size agglomerations in Kazakhstan. These agglomerations could contribute to regional development in the way big cities do to the development of the whole country.

The main considered issues are to identify areas that require in-depth study; to determine the overall recreational industry trends for the Kazakhstan regions; to focus designers' attention on some possible decisions for improving defined problems. The study is based on the results of the social surveys that were conducted through questionnaires in the cities of Kazakhstan: Aktobe, Zharkent, Kyzylorda, and areas of influence of these cities. These are three regional centers with some important destinations of the local and even foreign tourists.

Area of research that was held in Aktobe is similar to Aktobe region (Figs. 1, 2). It is located in the north-west part of the Kazakhstan republic. Total area is more than 300,000 km². The population is over 830,000 people (according to the statistics on 1 September 2015). The central city is Aktobe city. It is mainly an industrial city with developed production of ferroalloys, chromium compounds, and agricultural engineering, and others. Total population is about 440,000 people. Villages and towns connected to Aktobe also have industrial and agricultural orientation [16].

Among tourism and recreational attractions Aktobe region has several national parks that include unique wetlands and lake systems with rich flora and fauna which are good resources for eco-tourism. The most important of them is Irgiz Turgai Reserve. In addition, Aktobe is regional culture center with interesting museums, theatres and other recreation facilities. The amount of internal tourists accommodated in Aktobe region in 2014 was about 200,000 people (24% of region population) [16].

Survey of Kyzylorda agglomeration was covered in three districts of Kyzylorda's region: Syrdarya district, Zhalagash region, Shieli District and two towns located in neighboring regions: Zhanakorgan and Zhosaly (Fig. 3). This territory is located in the southern part of Kazakhstan. The total population of studied area is over 460,000. The central city is Kyzylorda with more than 250,000 residents (2013). Currently, the most important economic impact of the area under review is transit transportation that includes gas and oil pipelines, railways and especially new "Western Europe — Western China" highway that could have a great effect on the economy of the whole region. Besides, there are other developing areas as mining operations and agriculture.

Traditional kinds of tourism are not very perspective in Kyzylorda agglomeration because of hard climate and bad tourism infrastructure. However, some unique objects like Baikonur Space Center, Aral Sea and Barsakelmessky State Nature Reserve, Kyzylkum and Moyynkum deserts, and others could be very attractive for modern types of tourism. Actually level of tourism development is very low. In 2014, the amount of domestic tourists accounted 95,000 that is less than 15 % of region population [16].

Zharkent with its urban influence zone is located in Panfilov's district (Almaty region) in the southeastern part of Kazakhstan (Fig. 4). Zharkent agglomeration is considered as a micro-agglomeration because its

population is only 125,000. Nevertheless, it has a great importance as trade "gates" between Kazakhstan and China. The principal economic orientation of the district is agriculture. The central city is Zharkent with 43,000 residents. The survey has also covered 12 rural districts of Panfilov's district with population of about 82,000 [16].

Thanks to the development of tourism, Panfilov's district has rich natural and historical resources. The territory of district includes the part of Dzungarian Ala Tau Mountains and Altyn Emel national park. Several interesting objects of cultural and historical heritage are located in Zharkent and surrounding areas. In addition, Zharkent was one of the points of famous Silk Way. Good opportunities for tourists from China are provided by special one-day-non-visa regime that potentially could be expanded. In 2014, 30,000 internal tourists [16] visited the area under consideration.

3. Social survey as a research method for architects and planners

Residents' survey, as a method of social study, appeared in the first half of the nineteenth century in the USA. The method was used to examine people's opinion on political changes. For example, large-scale questionnaires were arranged to forecast presidential vote results, but this type of questionnaires did not become popular. Due to the incidents of the wrong forecasts,



Fig. 1. Fragments of Aktobe city's urban space



Fig. 2. Fragments of Aktobe agglomeration's urban space



Fig. 3. Fragments of Kyzylorda agglomeration's urban space



Fig. 4. Fragments of Zharkent agglomeration's urban space

the method started to be considered as not reliable. The social surveys as questionnaires have started to be used worldwide in the second half of the twentieth century [17]. By that time technology of this kind of social survey was developed enough to consider it as a scientific method. The results of surveys conducted by reputable companies (Gallup, Roper Center and Crossley), showed their practical value and social surveys as questionnaires gained a certain popularity both in society and in the academic world. However, there are some important criteria that have to be followed to get good results from a survey. First of all, main respondents have to be formed from the representative group of population depending on the studied issue. The second is an equability of the respondents in terms of demographic structure: participation of all population's significant segments in the survey (by age, income, nationality, place of residence, etc.). There are also distribution methods, ensuring anonymous participation and other important factors that may impact on the quality of a survey. Social survey are popular in social sciences [18]. However, it has started to be used in other sciences where consideration of people's perception is important. For example, many architectural and urban design studies have been carried out with the integration of the questionnaires to understand how people perceive their living physical environment.

Development of the physical environment for tourism requires an understanding of the people opinion and

demands. The creation of the appropriate architectural and urban design may positively influence the development of the tourism sector [7, 12, 19]. There are also academic studies aimed to show how social survey results can be used for planning of the better local tourism facilities [5]. Efficiency of tourism and recreation facilities has a direct impact on their attractiveness to visitors. Therefore, the questionnaires involving an understanding of the local people's needs are one of the important tools for us to learn about better location, functional contain, spatial image of tourism infrastructure. Some of the topics for development of the surveys about of the local situation are:

- places and purposes of trips, the popularity of certain tourism destinations;
- preferred forms of tourism;
- quality of tourism services and their maintenance;
- transport accessibility of tourism facilities;
- the costs of services;
- the level of security, health care and hygiene;
- dates and length of stay, etc.

There are different manuals and recommendations that describe how to obtain better results from analysis of the tourism situation (Lennon, Sirakaya-Turk, Alsos), in particular, how to assess a quality of tourist services (European communities) [13–15, 20]. Identification of social trends in the development of recreational and tourism facilities have a particular importance for urban agglomerations development. In many cities

around, planning decisions about city development are based on the results of the population surveys. For example, Barcelona tourism industry development plan was developed involving intensive social surveys [21]. The results of the social studies may affect architectural and urban planning decisions as the location of tourist sites in the structure of a city or region, the style of tourist facilities such as architectural design, the functional structure of premises, seasonal usage, capacity and others. The attractiveness of the physical infrastructure for tourists could become one of the key factors, especially if we consider a heritage of the historical sites [8–10, 22, 23].

In this study, we pay attention to the short-term vacation facilities that are used not only by tourists, but also by the local population. The understanding of the current condition for a short-term vacation may assist to approach the development of the domestic and international tourism in Kazakhstan in a more sustainable way. By short-term vacation facilities we mean places that are visited for a day or a weekend. Usually, the total duration of the stay does not exceed 3 days. Most of the short-term vacation facilities are located either in the city or in an accessible distance. In our opinion, the surveys of short-term vacation within selected agglomerations allow to come up with the some useful findings that can be further used to form a touristic content of the urban agglomeration of Kazakhstan.

4. Results of short term rest organization study in the agglomerations of Kazakhstan

The social survey was conducted in the period from 2013 to 2015 in the framework of the research aiming to understand the influence area of the central cities of agglomeration: Aktobe, Zharkent, Kyzylorda. The questionnaire included questions about the satisfaction of place of residence in local recreational areas as well as the general development of infrastructure and transport connections between central city and suburban area. The questionnaires were distributed with the support of the local authorities. The local Public Service Centers played a role of the main distribution points. The survey was conducted both in central cities and in some of the important settlements of agglomeration. The survey was able to ensure the participation of different segments of the population. As the result of the survey, we collected about 6,000 filled forms: 2,000 per each of the studied areas. The expected error was calculated and it was not over 5 % that is acceptable for pilot studies.

One of the main parts of the questionnaire aimed to study a current state of the short-term vacation. The questions revealed main directions of the vocational travels to the countryside; location preferences (near the water, in the mountains, natural reserves, public parks, individual garden plots, etc.); comfort preferences

(camp side, touristic centres, hotels, renting a private property, etc.), preferences of the recreational type (static — inside the entertainment complexes and sanatoriums, dynamic — excursions, eco-tourism, etc.). The understanding of the local people preferences was important to identify main recreational processes and demands that are being formed within the main agglomerations of Kazakhstan. The results of the each case study are presented below.

The Aktobe agglomeration survey results are shown in Figs. 5, 6. The survey was conducted into two stages — in the central city and in the suggested agglomeration area. The results are introduced separately to compare situation in the city and in suburbs.

The outdoor rest in the summer time (e.g. near the waterfront or in the forest) is the most popular type of the recreation both in Aktobe and in suburbs (33.2 % and 47.7 % of respondents answered positively). The popularity could be explained by deficit of anthropogenic recreational services. This also explains the fact that these percentages in the suburbs higher than in the city. However, provided preferences are seasonal. During the cold seasons, the majority of respondents choose to rest at home (27 % and 32.7 % in Aktobe city and surrounding area accordingly). This fact raises the need of the planning better facilities to attract people to arrange their leisure time outside of the home even during cold winters. It should be also noted that recreation in winter is complicated also by local climatic conditions.

The Kyzylorda agglomeration survey results are shown in Fig. 7. During the summer, the most popular destination is also outdoor rest (33.4 %). Some people also prefer to rest at home (21.3 %) and in country houses (15.4 %). During the winter, the majority of respondents (49 %) choose to spend their holidays at home. It can be owing to the considerably high costs of other types of rest as well as the lack of the affordable inside entertainments arranged in winter. The preferences of “al fresco” rest (51 %) instead of hotels (17.3 %), flower beds (18.7 %) and camp sides (13 %) also confirm conclusions mentioned previously.

The Zharkent agglomeration survey results are shown in Fig. 8. During the summer, a significant part of respondents prefer to spend their leisure time in the mountains or near the water reservoirs (45 %). In addition, 33 % of respondents choose to spend their time at home. Other types of recreational activities according to this survey are much undeveloped. Less people are willing to visit outdoor recreational facilities during the winter because of the lack of them (19 %). The number of people preferring to stay at home in the winter becomes even higher (58 %). Comparing to other cities surveyed, this is the highest rate, pointed out the lowest level of recreational infrastructure. It is even more evident because climate and recreational resources of Zharkent surrounding area are better than those in two previous cases. The number of respondents

preferring to spend their holidays in a camp side accounts 8%. Considering that 60% of population like to have a rest “al fresco”, active types of vacation have a very big potential to develop.

5. Conclusion

The current situation of the recreation activities within the small-size urban agglomeration of Kazakhstan requires a special attention of the local authorities, architects and urban designers who are involved in the development of the recreational facilities. To ensure the tourism development of all three agglomerations, it is required to use all potential of natural environment. The project of Zharkent agglomeration must be developed with the attention to the creation of the system of mountain recreation centres outside these cities.

The greater attention should be paid to the development of transportation network between the central cities of agglomeration and their neighbourhood. The time spent on travel should not exceed 1–2 hours. However, it is also important to limit usage of the potentially recreational areas for construction of the individual housing. The projects of the recreational facilities for a short-time vacation have to consider the impact of new complexes on the natural ecosystem.

It is important to develop recreational infrastructure for year-round use. Enough attention should be paid to the arrangement of special mobile facilities for short-term recreation activities near water reservoirs and in public parks. Development of special historical sightseeing and cultural complexes has a special value for the Zharkent agglomeration.

The results of the survey revealed some of the main challenges of a short-time vacation in three agglomerations of Kazakhstan. Each of these issues can be considered as a certain signal for further development of the tourism industry. In order to approach these issues in a right way, it is necessary to initiate at least three additional detailed researches. The first research can be on the seasonal structure of the recreation and on how to improve the leisure time of the residents during cold winters and hot summers. The second research may be an assessment of the capacities of the recreational facilities located within important natural areas as mountains, river and lakesides and forests. The last one can address the current situation the regional transportation and the improvement of the main recreation area accessibility to local population.

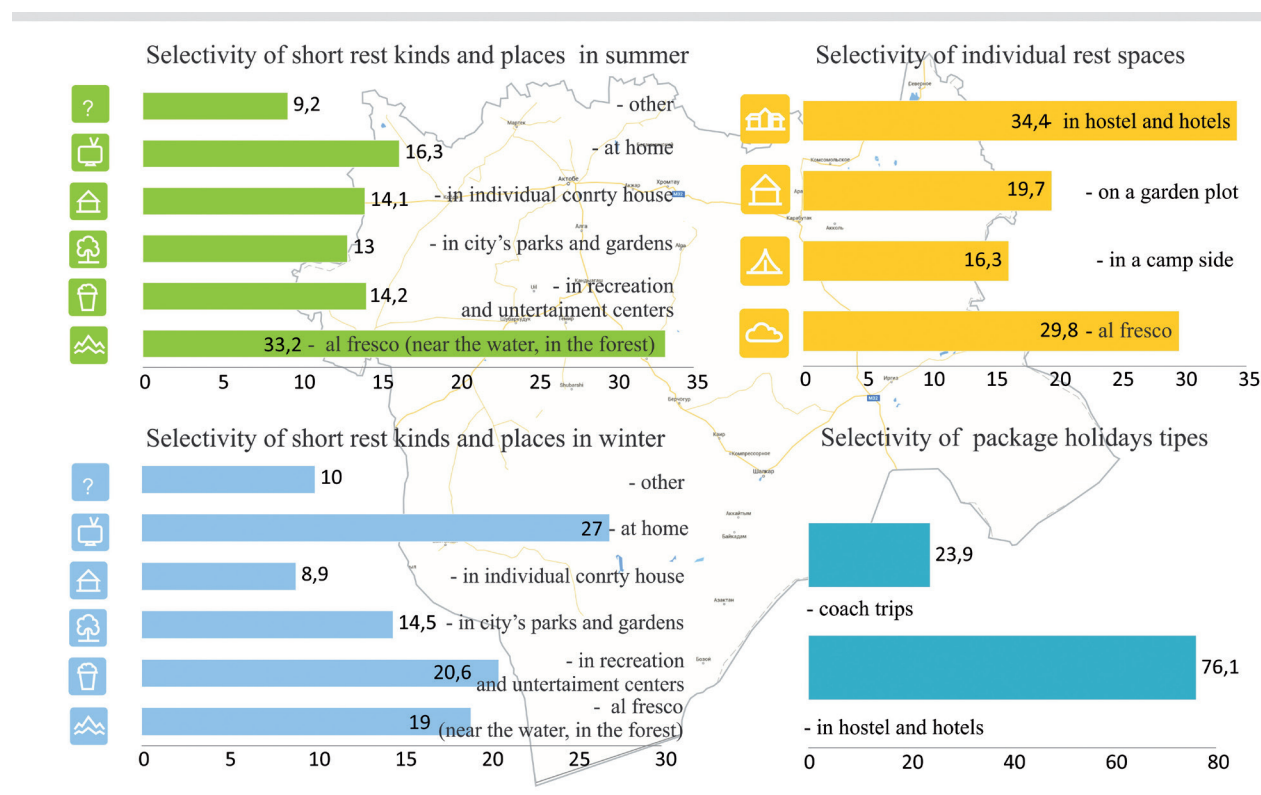


Fig. 5. Seasonal preferences of the short-term vacation in Aktobe city.

Source: Social Survey conducted by authors, 2014–2015

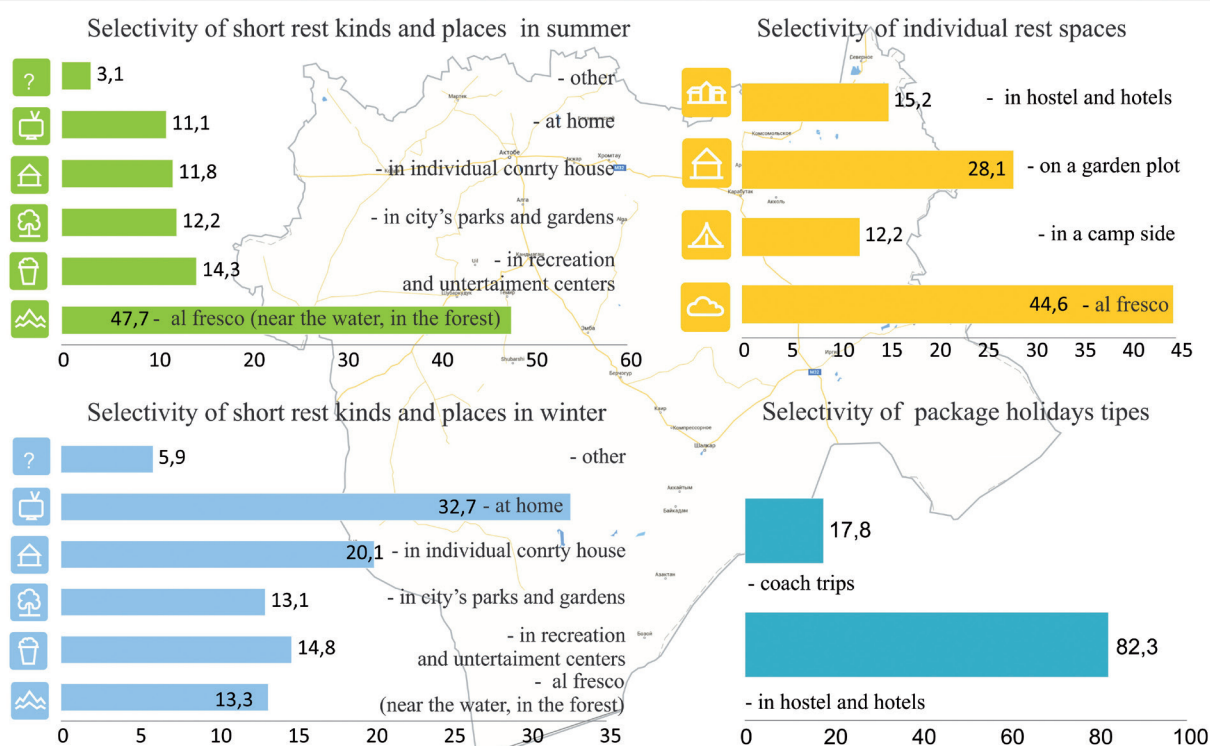


Fig. 6. Seasonal preferences of the short-term vacation in Aktobe agglomeration.

Source: Social Survey conducted by authors, 2014–2015

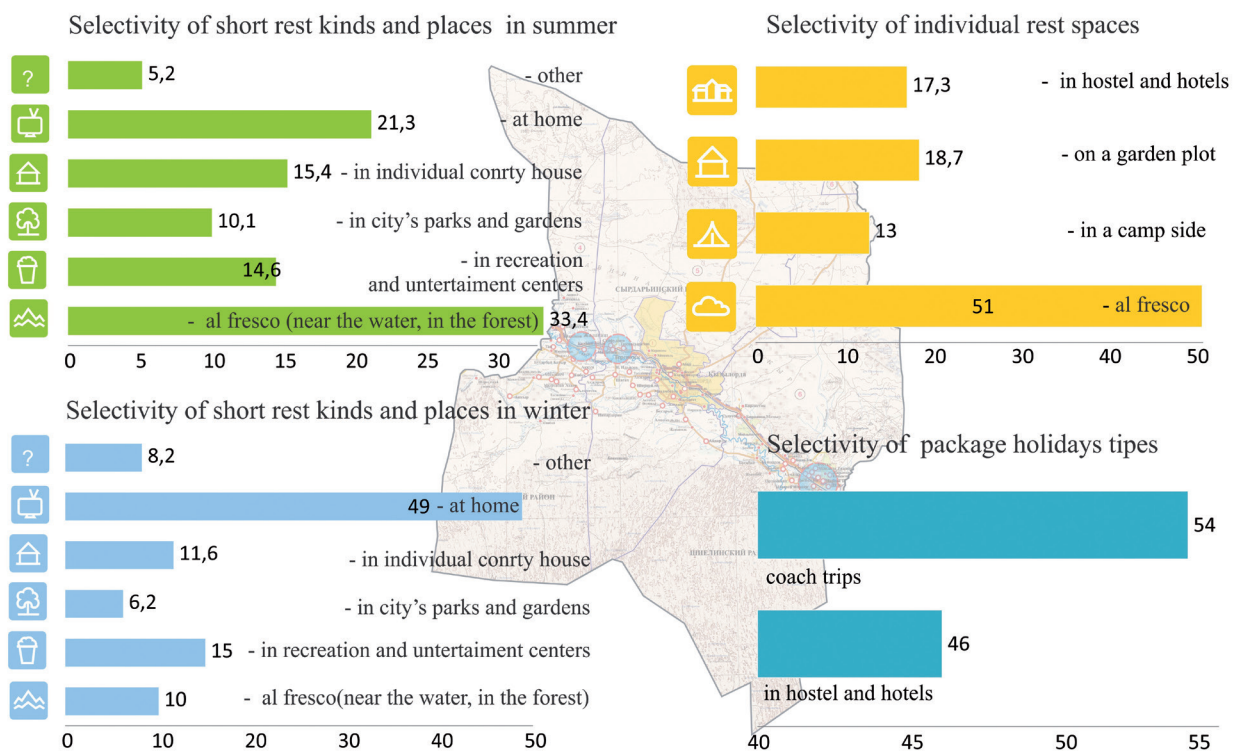


Fig. 7. Seasonal preferences of the short-term vacation in Kyzylorda agglomeration.

Source: Social Survey conducted by authors, 2014–2015

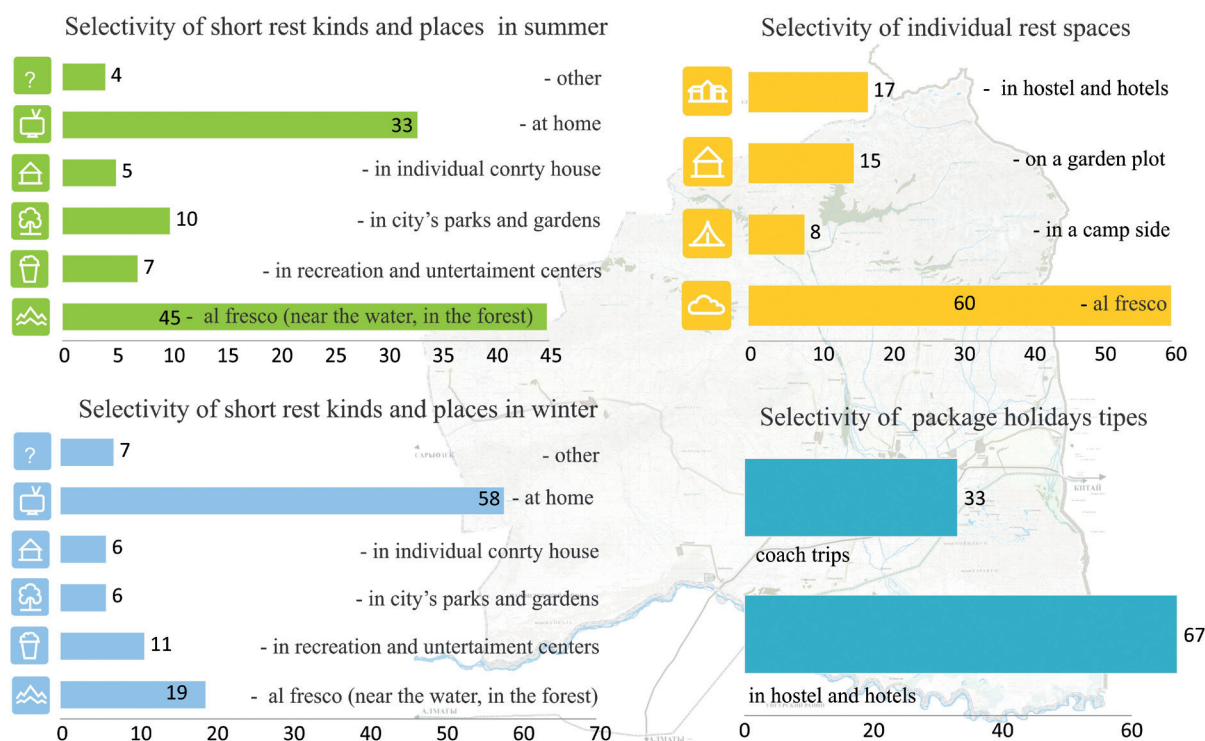


Fig. 8. Seasonal preferences of the short-term vacation in Zharkent agglomeration.

Source: Social Survey conducted by authors, 2014–2015

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